

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT
LAWRENCE**

**INFORMANT: WILLIAM LUKAS
INTERVIEWER: YILDEREY ERDENER
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**Y = YILDEREY
W = WILLIAM**

SG-LA-T544

This tape begins with interviewer, Yilderey in mid sentence:

Y: very very interesting. I mean uh, really very interesting. I enjoy it.

W: Hold this. There was uh, you know in those days too, is that all? (Y: Yeah) In those days too they used to have parades. And each ethnic group would have a group of themselves in the parade downtown.

Y: What do you mean?

W: Well I think it was Labor Day. Each ethnic group, it was the Polish, Lithuanians, the Irish and the Italians, and the Syrians, and who else? That's who. And the French. Where they each had a group and they'd carry their own flag. Their old country flag. And you could, well here come the French, you could tell by the flag.

Y: What was the occasion?

W: I think it was Labor Day. I think it was Labor Day, yeah. They used to have their, or Fourth of July. Either one of those days. I don't quite clearly remember which one. I think it was mostly Fourth of July, because of the birth of a nation. Yeah, we, there were a lot of things. I'll be honest with you. I'd rather have those days than I would now. Not in the sense of making money, but at liberty we had, closeness we had with people. You don't have that anymore. That's gone. Long gone. Friendships I mean. Family wise too. Families are broken up on account of money.

Y: So how do you explain it? You said that cars were one of the reasons.

W: Materialism. Materialism, that's what it was. Everybody started buying homes, and houses, and cars.

Y: How did it break the bond?

W: Easy! The old people had a funny thing in my time. If, I'll give you an instance. When I worked in Marland Mills, this Polish fellow, his mother and father came up to him, and they says, "we're old in years, will you take care of us? We can't take care of ourselves." So the young Polish son said, "okay", but first he had to ask his wife. It's a mutual consent. One can say yes, and the other one can say no. So the mother and father lived with them. Now the father passed away after two months living with his son, so automatically the money the father had went to his wife. So he said to his wife, he said "gee, my dad passed away, do you still want to keep my mother?" And his wife said, "well she'd no bother, why not?" Now they paid for everything. They bought her clothes. They paid for her food. They didn't charge her nothing. She didn't have to pay board and room. When the mother passed away they found that the mother had made a will. So the son said, oh "good." But when the lawyer read the will his youngest brother who lived in California never saw his mother, never sent her a letter, got all the money. Now what do you think it's going to do to this gentleman here who footed all the bills? He went up to his brother and says, well Phil, all I want out of you is about eight thousand dollars, because she left forty-five thousand dollars. Eight thousand dollars, that will, I'll call it square what we spent on Mas and Pa. You know what his younger brother told him? "The hell with you." He went out and bought a Cadillac and drove it back to California. That split up the family. Why did the mother and father do that? That's how they were. I told you, the youngest and the oldest. It split up a lot of families. It's a shame, but that happened more than once. Horror stories I call them. So why did they, why were the (--)

Y: What kind of ethnic background were they? Lithuanians, Italians?

W: No, they were Polish. I told you they were Polish.

Y: I wonder if among a certain ethnic group, that kind of attitude you could find more than the other groups. Who knows?

W: Well I think what the older groups did, I mean the folks, they always favored the oldest son, or the daughter, the first born. That was something they carried over from the old country, into this country, and they never let it go. Course that split up a lot of families. I could give you a good instance in Lowell, just happened recently. There were eight sisters, all right. So we went up to visit this certain person, she said, "gee, my mother passed away and we're going to go up for a reading of the will." She says, "my mother always said, everybody will be treated equally." So she said, "I'm glad my mother's that way." You know what they found out? They were left out completely. One sister got all the money. Got all the property. Got everything. Those seven sisters are still fighting to this day. Broke up the family. And they were French. But see, I'm just saying how they people. I don't believe in that. I believe if I have three sons, or two daughters, they're going to be treated equally. I don't want them to break up on account of my foolish idea of leaving one some money, and leaving the other nothing.

Y: I guess you don't have such a problem, because you have only one son.

W: One son. Just the same, I had two brothers and a sister. So I know. I went through the experience of having brothers and sisters, and I believe they should be treated equally.

Y: Just a, what does your son do?

W: He's a teacher. (Y: He teaches what?) He teaches school in Nashua, New Hampshire.

Y: Well there are so many other interesting subjects, but um, I would like to ask you (--)

W: Well you can ask me about work.

Y: About efficiency experts.

W: Huh! Now that (--)

Y: When were they, I mean what do you remember? What do you(--)

W: Well I remember very clearly what they did.

Y: When do you remember they were exist?

W: I would say between 1945 to about 1958 they had efficiency experts.

Y: When you started 1934, you don't remember any efficiency?

W: They didn't have any.

Y: What about uh, (--)

W: Not on the job. It all depends on the job you had. I was not on piece work. Most efficient experts worked on piece work, people who were making money by piece work. That was the weavers, the spinners, the winders, the comb winders. And uh, who else? The menders.

Y: But you moved from Pacific Mill to Wood Mill?

W: I moved from the Pacific to the Marland Mills. From the Marland, no, no. I moved from the Pacific when I was laid off. I went over and worked in the Wood Mill.

Y: What uh, it was 1930 (--)

W: Oh, it was about 1934, 35. When I was (--)

Y: And then, can you tell me briefly uh, the mills you work? So first the Pacific Mills.

W: Pacific. (Y: And than?) Then the Wood, (Y: Wood Mill) Then back to the Pacific. (Y: Back?) To the Pacific. And then to Marland Mills.

Y: How do you spell Marland Mills?

W: M A R L A, L A N D. Marland. (Y: Marland. All right) Now that was owned by J. P Stevens. (Y: North Andover?) North Andover, yes. They were wealthy textile people. And then from Marland Mill? Went into Honeywell.

Y: You (--) Oh, okay. Right. And uh, so we were talking about the efficient experts. So as far as you are concern, you did not see those people?

W: I didn't have, I had no contact with them, because the jobs that I always had didn't require efficiency experts. But if you were on piece work, they had efficiency experts up you (--)

Y: Could you go around and see what other people did?

W: Oh yes, I was at liberty to travel if that's what you mean. The type of job I had, I could. I told you I was a shipper and a receiver in most of the places. So I had the tendency to go from department, to department, to department. Find out what the orders were going out that day. Or what's coming in that day, because I had to for warn the other people what's coming in, or what's going out.

Y: Well that was part of your job I guess, huh?

W: Yeah, it was part of my job.

Y: But the other people, they couldn't (--)

W: No, they were, you stay here you know, sit there, you don't move. Now the weavers, I can remember. Tony, remember this? When the weaving in the Pacific, they had ten looms. (Tony: oh yeah) Before they closed they were running eighty.

Y: What do you mean? One person (--)

W: One person. (Y: was running eighty?) Eighty looms. (Y: 8 0?) 80. (Tony: Because they figured they weren't doing enough work, that's why) That's right.

Y: What year? About, around(--)

W: That was in the fifties, before they closed. That was in the rayon division. Now that was a different division. They had woolen, and then they had worsted, and then they had rayon. Rayon was smaller looms. And they worked faster.

Y: I mean how one person can possibly take care of eighty.

W: That's a good question. You could ask that of the efficiency man who made that job that way. How could one person run that?

Y: But obviously they did!

W: Obviously they tried to. Not they did. Did is something that you accomplished. Tried is something you couldn't do.

Y: Right. And uh, what was the reason you moved from one mill to another?

W: Closing down.

Y: Wood Mill did not close down when you went to Marland Mills?

W: No, but I had a better job. (Y: Better in terms of ?) Better in terms of money. (Y: Pay. What else? Other benefits?) Well there were more, there was more of an incentive, because I, I used to work when I was in the shipping room, I had a lot of close contact with the card room. And by going in and out of there I knew jobs just by looking at them, I knew how to do them. Actually I didn't have the experience to do it, but I had the knowledge of how to do it. So automatically I just went boom, right into a job, and I got a ten dollar raise right off the bat, so I took the job.

Y: Did you always do the same thing, same job?

W: No, no. There were different jobs to do. I mean uh, when I worked, the last time I worked in Marlands was in the card room. I did card stripping. I also fixed machinery. I also was what they called a finished tender. And I was also a feeder. And alley man. Those were all the jobs that were all inter-related. But the best job I had was setting up machinery. Set up the whole machine.

Y: Why best? In terms of (--)

W: In terms of money and you didn't work as hard. You worked with your head, not with your hands. You set up machinery, it's just like an automobile. You've got to be, you've got to know what you're doing. Not everybody could do that job.

Y: So it was not hard work, and you got paid (--)

W: It was hard work, it was heavy lifting and all that. But in terms of, I could take my time and nobody would push me, whereas on the other jobs it was push, push, push, push. You couldn't stop the machine. You got to keep it going, keep it going. Something went wrong with it, you run over to fix it, tell them to fix it. He'd run over and fix it, and you just kept on going. There's no such thing as taking it easy in textiles. Textiles was a system that was set up to make the owners money, not the workers. They bled. You can read in history about what the textile owners were making millions, but they were paying peanuts.

Y: What about Honeywell?

W: Honeywell was the "Garden of Eden".

Y: [Laughs] Why so?

W: Why so? It was a much more leisurely pace. It was a clean job. You can walk in with your suit and do the job. Nobody hounded you. It was, again it was the job that I had. Now people on production, they had efficiency men, believe it or not. Even into electronics. In other words, if you were putting out twenty units, and you were the type that looked around and talked a lot, an efficiency man was watching you, he'd clock you. Next week you'd come in, you'd have to make twenty-five units, not twenty. So those five units are suppose to absorb the time that you've been playing around with, but it wasn't hard on you. It was just to keep your mind on the work, and do the work. Manual dexterity, that's all it was, most of it. Now there's where the women come in and play the big hand in electronics, because they work fast with their hands and they could pick up smaller articles than men could. There were men doing the same work, but they weren't as fast as the women.

Y: So uh, let's make some comparison between the textile and the hi-tech. You worked only in Raytheon, right? N

W: No, I worked in Honeywell. Honeywell.

Y: Oh yeah, Honeywell, right. Honeywell, you started in 1964.

W: '66.

Y: '66. They came in '64, didn't they?

W: They came in '64, but I started in '66.

Y: '66. So you worked in the same building, Wood Mill, where you used to work.

W: Right, exactly the same building.

Y: But what changes did you see in terms of interior? I mean (--)

W: Interior, a heck of a lot. They repainted, they restructured the whole place. You'd never recognize it. They sanded the floors, they varnished them, they did (--) It was a spotless interior. Spotless. Textiles, there was oil on the floor, there was wool on the floor, there was dust everywhere. Big difference. It was a better atmosphere to work in. More cheery. You had a cafeteria. (Y: Where, in Honeywell?) In Honeywell.

Y: You did not have a cafeteria (--)

W: You never had a cafeteria in textiles. You ate on the fly, which meant you ate while you

were working. You were never allotted time to each your lunch.

Y: I understood they gave workers half an hour break, lunch break. Is it true?

W: That didn't come till years later. Most of the time everybody worked right through. In other words, if your shift was six to two, you worked your eight hours. Six to two was eight hours. You grabbed your lunch on the fly. If you worked from six to three, you had a half an hour break maybe.

Y: So the conditions were better? Work conditions.

W: Oh, work conditions were, it was like night and day. Night and day.

Y: Honeywell is the only electronic company you worked? Is there another one?

W: Yeah, I put sixteen years in there.

Y: Sixteen. What did you do?

W: Again, I told you, shipper and receiver.

Y: Oh, again the same thing.

W: See, my record went right along with me.

Y: So you are the shipper?

W: Anytime I, I passed a resume in, it would be right on there, shipping and receiving. How many years I worked there and everything.

Y: Only in Marland Mill they had their own. I mean (--)

W: So you did something else there.

Y: No, not Malden, Marland Mills they had their own little click. In other words the boss' sons were in there, and he wasn't going to put them out for me. You know what I mean? And that's another thing I didn't like about textiles. The manager, we should call him the boss, had absolute rule over the workers. I mean fire and hire on the spot. It wasn't till later on, about ten years, they started up with personnel offices. You had to stand outside the mill, and the boss would come out and say, "you, you, you, and you go to work today. The rest of you go home, I don't need you." That's how they operated. And if you did something wrong, and the boss didn't like you, you're fired. Get out of here. Go down and get your pay and get out of here. Sign the slip, and you get your money, and you're all done. You'll never get in that mill again. Black ball.

Y: But those mills, which had the union, did I understood the, if there was a union, I understood they couldn't do that so easily. They couldn't fire.

W: Let me tell you something about the unions in Textiles. The unions in textiles play hand and gloves with the owner. The owners got what they want, the unions got what they want, and the worker was left to shit for himself. The unions didn't have what they called a closed shop. Do you know what a closed shop is? Everybody belongs to the union. That's a closed shop. But if 50% don't belong to the union, and 50% does, the ones that don't belong to the unions are saying, well we're getting the same benefits as the one in the union, so we don't care. That's where the company had you where you wanted, where they wanted you. The unions say to do something, they'd say no, we can't, it's not unanimous.

Y: Did you belong to a union in Honeywell?

W: I, no, we didn't need one. Because Honeywell had a peculiar thing. They gave us everything that a union gave. In other words if the union said, tomorrow morning we're giving them a 5% raise, Honeywell, right there on the spot, 5%, there you are. If the union says we got two more days of vacation, Honeywell was right there. Here's your two days vacation. That way they kept out the union. They have the same benefits, but you didn't have to pay to the union, or anything. That's why the union never could get into Honeywell. Which was good, because we had the same benefits as the union. The only thing is, is now, now I realized later on the unions did give some better benefits than Honeywell, which we weren't aware of. Like if you worked in Western Electric, which was unionized, they have sick benefits when they retire. We don't get any at Honeywell. The minute you leave the job all of your sick benefits are gone. You're on your own. That was a bad feature.

Y: What about your, not you as a person, but the relationship between the worker and the boss in the textile mill and the Honeywell mill. Honeywell. I say Honeywell mill.

W: Well that's all right. The relationship between, in textiles(--)

Y: Could you interact with the boss while you were working?

W: Very rarely, unless you had a complaint or something, or you wanted something straightened out.

Y: Section hand, or overseer, in textiles.

W: Well you talk to your section hand, he would automatically wouldn't give you a definition of, or to regard the problem. He would go in and talk to the boss. The boss was the boss. Just like (--)

Y: Have you ever seen those big guys in textile?

W: Oh sure! Sure! Once a month. I used to see, when I worked in the Wood Mill, I think I saw the man that was Superintendent twice in four months. He'd walk by with a straw hat and a jacket, and just wave. And that was the end. You never saw him again. But you never could see him neither, because he was well protected by the managers, by the bosses. See the bosses were

absolute rulers. In other words, I'm going to fire this guy before he goes upstairs and complains. Big boy don't hear about that, does he? He's already got rid of the trouble, so he hires another fellow. They were cute.

Y: And then later how did it change? Honeywell, did the boss knew your name, and said, "hi Bill, how are you today, and what are you doing?"

W: All the bosses knew every worker by name. And first and last name. Because you had a badge identifying. But if he didn't know you, he'd just look at your badge and say, "hi Joe."

Y: Because of the badge they knew, otherwise they couldn't?

W: Personally, no. No. But they knew all their workers by site. Not by name, by site. A lot of bosses didn't know everybody that worked in his department. He made it his business to know. But some bosses, it's like people. One man might be interested in something, another man won't be.

Y: I guess what I'm trying to ask you, was the management closer to the workers in the [unclear]?

W: Oh absolutely. Absolutely. In Honeywell, absolutely. We could, we could even go up and have a meeting. We could call a meeting right in our department. Don't have to go call and see the big shot. Just call a meeting and the manager would listen to you. And if you were right, it was done right there. Okay, no more of this.

Y: Couldn't do that in [unclear].

W: Oh, you're a voice in the wilderness in Textiles. You cried and you cried alone. No, no, unless you get twenty, thirty people to go along with you. Then you would have a back up force, then he'd have to listen to you. Because that many people we figured there's something really wrong here. Now the difference in Honeywell and Textiles was like night and day. Night and day. You could go home without being tired. Maybe your eyes would be tired. Physically you weren't. I mean you could go home and have a garden, you could go home and dig up the garden, or (--)

Y: While working in Honeywell?

W: Yeah. But if you were in Textiles you were too tired to go out and do anything. That's right. They exhausted you, because it was a physical thing. Whereas over here you had to use your head and you had to use your fingers, which was a lot easier than using strength bull muscle.

Y: Did people in textile, the same ethnic group, ban together?

W: Yes, they only did that for one reason. All could talk the same language. If I was Syrian, I very well couldn't talk Lithuanian, could I? I had to go and seek my own ethnic group.

Y: But you could speak English. So you did not hang with Lithuanians?

W: I was lucky enough to go to school and learn English, but these people who came from the old country never picked up English on their own. They didn't go to school here.

Y: Some of them went to night schools.

W: Some of them went to night school. It's like over here. If somebody wants to further his education, he'll go to graduate school, right? These people didn't have a chance to go to graduate school. You're lucky to get through high school, the old timers. They had night school, yes, but the only ones who went to night school were the younger ones. I mean they probably came over on the boat with their fathers and mothers. I mean they came directly from the old. But we were born here, they weren't. I mean that's something I could never understand. I knew a fellow that came, he was two years old when he came from the old country. You know he still had an accent when he was twenty? I could never figure out why. That's because at home they talked nothing but his own language. They used English as a second language. But that's the way things were.

Y: So if your parents were first generation, you are the second, and your son is the (--)

W: I'm the first generation of my parents when they came into this country.

Y: Okay, first generation of Americans. (W: Right) But let's call them first generation, your parents, and you are the second generation for a minute, and your son is the third generation. Uh, how do you see the education? So your parents, don't talk about your parents necessarily, but in general what you saw around? So the first generation, you father and mother, they had to work in the textile mills, because they do not have another, not many options. Maybe shoe factory [unclear].

W: They had no options, no.

Y: And you came along with your sisters and brothers. You had more options than your parents.

W: You had an option to finish school. High school at least. (Y: Right) They didn't. (Y: Right) All right. Now, (--)

Y: In terms of jobs, not in school.

W: Now I have a child, boy. I have an education. I can see where an education, furthered through college would get him better results than what I had. In other words I am building him up to something better than I ever had. So I sent him through college. The best thing I ever did.

Y: So you did that, consciously you did that.

W: We had that in mind from day one. The kid's going to go to this college. We never told him. That's one thing we kept from him until he graduated from high school. Then he says, "jee,

where am I going to go now?" I said, "you're going to college." Well he hit the roof. Oh he danced around like a (--) He said, "really?" I said, "you, you have your choice. Pick your school." Then he had to go through all exams and everything, the entrance exams to find out.

Y: In fact it was good that mills closed down.

W: I think that was the best thing that ever happened to the city of Lawrence, when the mills closed down.

Y: Because of that?

W: No, because it became more diversified after the mills closed down. Then you had your electronics come in. You had different types of business come in. And that, you did away with this mass hysteria of laying off all, all year. Every year there's a guaranteed lay-off. You could almost bank on it. June is coming, we'll be down, "I'll see you down the beach Joe. Why? Hey, I got laid off yesterday." It was common.

Y: It must have been very disturbing. I mean insecure feeling. You don't know what (--)

W: Insecure feeling in a way, yes, but not too disturbing, because you knew the mills were going to pick up. It was just an off seasonal thing. It's just like you can grow beets all summer long, but you know you're not going to grow any in the winter. So that's the off season. All right? So that's the way it was with Textiles. The off seasons came, you took them. And by the way, it was, it was bad because you never got any money from anywhere unless you went on welfare. In those days when you went on welfare you got five dollars a week, if you were eligible. You couldn't have a radio, you couldn't have a bicycle. You couldn't have a car. You had just the bare essentials in order to get that five dollars.

Y: You mean you couldn't buy those things with five dollars? They didn't let the people to buy those things, but buy basic (--)

W: Basic, that's all it was. Well look at it now? But that's, that's the way it was. But uh, what I meant to say was, people didn't go on welfare, they were too proud. A lot of people didn't accept welfare. They'd rather struggle. Nowadays it's a common occurrence. Hey, go on welfare, why work? Three generations on welfare now. And another thing too, what I liked about that the [unclear] were now people. There were thousands of people here in Lawrence without jobs. Thousands. I mean I'd say about ten or twelve thousand people. That's(--)

Y: 1953, 54?

W: It was almost a third of the population of the town. It was like doomsday, you know? And another thing I meant to, was when unemployment compensation came in, that was a savior. Now the people didn't care if they got laid off. At least they were getting ten dollars. The minimum was ten dollars a week.

Y: Do you remember the date when it started more or less? What year?

Side I ends
Side II begins

W: I only collected one unemployment check in all my life, which was ten dollars. One.

Y: It means you were never laid off?

W: I was laid off, but I was fortunate enough to work after that pretty steady. I mean I got into, I got into a situation, "well they needed me, they didn't need you", in textiles. So I was lucky. I remember the first time I got my check. I brought it home, I says to my mother, "look at this?" Because you had to go to the Armory in Lawrence to sign up for your check. They issued you one right there on the spot. Not like today.

Y: Yeah. And what about health insurance and those kinds of benefits?

W: What? They never had any.

Y: In textile they did later maybe?

W: Never had health insurance?

Y: Short before they closed down?

W: Never. You, you got hurt on the job, you had to sue them, and go to a good lawyer, and you had to sue the company. Nine times out of ten you never won.

Y: So when the mills closed down 19, early 50's, you were where? You were working at?

W: I was still in the Pacific.

Y: Pacific? You, I thought (--)

W: No, I was, there was switches there like I told you. You got laid off for so long a time, and then you got into a job and you worked there only a certain length of time. Then you went to another job, but it seems like, it seemed like I worked in a lot of places, but really it was only two places.

Y: Yeah, as you said, there were houses according to some sources, 20 some thousand people without any job at the beginning of 1950's. And some people say if you don't have a job, you abuse your wife, you abuse alcohol, you abuse drugs, you abuse people, you get moody, you do this and that. I don't mean you. But what did you see around? I mean how did those people cope with that kind of stress?

W: There was no drinking number one. (Y: No?) No. You couldn't, you didn't, if you went (--) Let me put it basically this way. If you have no money, how could you drink? You haven't even got any money to make the booze, let alone drink it. So he didn't worry about drinking. What you worried about is getting a job. That's what you worried about. I don't think they beat up their wives and kids. Not in those days. Everybody pulled together. It was, that's what I mean by when the cars came in, the families went bingo! Out the window. And to this day it's the same. You just look at your churches on Sunday. There's hardly anybody in church. Go down the beach on Sunday you'll see thousands and thousands down the beach. What brings them there, the automobile. Even the churches. I don't know if you remember this or not. They made a five o'clock Saturday mass because they figured the people were going to go out of town on Sundays. What did they get at five o'clock mass? Very very little people. I know, because of the church right next to me, Saint Augustine's. Very few people. (Y: What's his name?) Saint Augustine's on Tower Hill. Very few people. Everybody is going everywhere. You look at your highways on Sundays. I don't have to ask you? Look at your highways. Look at your highway today. I could take you on 495, and the question I always ask my wife is, who the hell is working with all these people on the road. Who is? They're not all retirees. Did you ever answer that? Ever answer that question? Who's working? These people can't have jobs and be riding around two o'clock in the afternoon, ten o'clock in the morning. Half past nine in the morning. What kind of jobs have they got.

Y: If you look back, which uh, which job was the most meaningful. Where you felt satisfied, where you felt productive?

W: Mule spinning, I'll tell you right now. Mule spinner. (Y: Mule spinner?) I was what they called a Jack Spinner. That was the correct name, Jack Spinning. I made more money when I was six years on that job than I ever did in textiles. We were paid more than the weavers were, but nobody knew about it. We were only a select group. There was only ten of us. Out of the whole mill, thousands that were employed, there was only ten of us. I was making a hundred and twenty-five, a hundred and thirty five dollars a week. (Y: A week?) A week, when you were making twenty, eighteen. (Y: It's not fair) It was the cream of the crop.

Y: It's not fair. Why so?

W: Highly skilled job. You had to run the machine by yourself. You had to put the stock in by yourself. You make a product by yourself. That's why you were paid that kind of money.

Y: I mean what was the reason for satisfaction and meaningfulness? Because of (--)

W: Your own job, your own boss, you went at the pace you wanted. You want to go fast, you go fast. You want to go slow, you go slow. If you want to go medium, you go medium. But that's the kind of money you made too. If you're a good fast worker, you made good money. If you're a medium worker, you made less. If you're a lazy worker, you made even less.

Y: So not having those guys (--)

W: Right, nobody bothered you.

Y: And also they paid well.

W: They paid excellent. My boss often told us, I should quit my job and become a mule spinner. You guys make more money than I do, which was the truth. He was only making seventy-five, we were making a hundred.

Y: Not even later, Honeywell job was not comparable?

W: Not comparable to what I was (--) Well you got to take the times. When I was making a hundred and twenty-five dollars, (--)

Y: When was that year more or less?

W: That was oh, gee, I don't quite remember the years. That was after I was married. I would say in the forties I worked in the Pacific again. When things were, I'll tell you how good it was. When I was bringing home a hundred and twenty five dollars clear, the only thing I ever paid for then I think was state tax, because I made over two thousand. But pork chops in those days were eleven cents a pound. My rent was only three dollars a week. You figure out, here I am with a hundred and twenty-five dollars.

Y: What did you do with the money Bill?

W: Put it in the bank. I bought a home later on. That's what I did with the money. I always had, I wanted to get enough money to buy a home, and I did.

Y: You still have that home?

W: I still have that home. I built it brand new.

Y: And when the people were laid off they did not make as much money as you did?

W: Oh no, some of them were making forty dollars a week, forty-five dollars a week, and I was still making over a hundred. I tell you, things were so good that I wish I hadn't lost it.

Y: Yeah, that was my next question. Why did you quit? Why did they uh(--)

W: Well what happened there is, you have to blame progress. They came up with a spinning machine that did all that we did, and about eight times as fast. And they put women on it for about twenty-five dollars a week. (Y: twenty-five dollars?) And they made it eight times as much product as we did. So they just took the wheels out and junked them, told us we were all done.

Y: So that was automatic machinery?

W: Yeah, it was automatic. Everything was automatic. They brought these machines in from

England, and they set them up. I could see it coming. I was smart enough to know, well ooh, here goes my job. What are these spinning machines? I asked my boss first. I says, "John, what's going to happen?" He says, "Billy, just look. I'm not going to say anything, just look." I says, "oh, I see. There goes the spinning job." He says, "I guess you're right." But he says, "we'll keep you on as long as possible, because for the overflow." In other words, if they had big orders they wanted everything to keep going. So to keep furnishing the weavers and the spinners, and all that. But they were smarter than we were. They bought more machines. Instead of the four they bought, they bought eight. So automatically we were out.

Y: That is interesting, because I mean [unclear] their machinery, and the technology put you out of your (--)

W: Progress. Out of work, right, it did to a lot of people. Don't you remember the days when they used to have horse carts, horse drawn carts and everything? The automobile came in? Where did the horse drawn carts go? In the dump. That's progress. Can't stop it.

Y: Any such examples in the textile mills, and what happened to you did happen to other people? Not in the spinning room, but in other departments?

W: Oh yes! They have, they have now Japanese took over most of the textiles for awhile there. Now they're on roller skates. Tending the machines on roller skates.

Y: A couple of week ago we were talking about people who brought things uh, I have two more questions to ask.

W: I'll be all done.

Y: We can stop right now.

W: You can stop right now.

Y: Okay. Well I hope, well I'll ask you some other time. I have other questions.

[tape is turned off and then on again]

W: In the insane asylums, break downs. You see the efficiency over there got so high that a lot of women couldn't make the quotas. So they automatically had break downs.

Y: Nervous break downs?

W: Right. That's efficiency.

Y: Yeah.

[Tape is turned off and then on again]

Y: Well today is um, what date is this?

W: April the 27th, 28th?

Y: 28th, April 28th, 1989. And William Lukas, L U K A S is with me. And last time we talked on March 29th, 1989. And that is kind of incomplete interview. [clears throat] Last time, I listened to the tape, and we were talking about Western Electric and the bonus system. (W: Oh! Oh!) Although you did not work in Western.

W: I didn't work there, but I heard a lot of bad stories about the place. What they did is they had a system over there where they awarded quotas. (Y: They what?) The awarded quotas. Each worker had to produce so much. Now if they had one worker in the squad they were working with that was very low on their quota, all the girls were jump her. In other words they'd go over and give her holy hell. Why didn't you make the quota? If we don't make the quota, we won't get out bonus. Our bonus will be cut down. So that was not an added incentive. That was more or less a demoralizing feature of their program. And that made a lot of women we heard that had nervous break downs, but I have no visible proof that they did, or they didn't. But I did know a lot of people who worked there said, yes, that was true, but it was kept quiet.

Y: I, and nobody could explain how it affected each other. If I worked slower than you, how did I affect your bonus if you worked fast enough? Can you explain that?

W: Well suppose there were ten people in a team. And they were, they were told that they had to produce 800 units. And with one slow worker they could never do that. They'd only produce 780, or 770. That's when the trouble started. They wanted that slow worker to catch up with the rest of them so that they could be awarded that bonus. Now to this day I don't know if that goes on as it used to, or it's been cancelled. I don't know, I've never worked there. This is only hearsay anyway.

Y: Right. What other bad stories? You said you heard bad stories?

W: It was about the only one. It was the working conditions, the working conditions themselves weren't too good. In order for them to go for a smoke, they had to ask their group leader, or their supervisor, whoever it was in charge of the group, that they wanted to go for a smoke. So when they did, they got up and they stood up against the wall in the aisle in front of everybody and had their smoke. And you can bet your boots they didn't stay too long smoking, with everybody watching them. So that was another way Western Electric got back at the workers. Well it was all, there weren't incentives, believe me. Now I worked in Honeywell. You smoked right at your desk, they didn't give a darn. And it was a, it was a better environment to work in than Western Electric. You had quotas, but they weren't that type of pushy about it, as long as you made about eighty percent, they were happy. In other words, nobody can produce. Not everybody can produce 100% like Western Electric tried to.

Y: How did they try to increase the productivity in the textile mills while you were working the Wood Mills?

W: The only way they did that was by putting you on piece work. If you were on day pay, it didn't matter if you made forty pieces or a thousand pieces, you were paid the same rate. But you're on piece work. They would give you a certain number of yards to make, or a certain number of pounds to achieve. And from that you advanced your pay. If you made, if you made say uh, ten dollars for a 100 pounds, and you made a 150 pounds, you know you get fifteen dollars. So that was an incentive, that they'll always make more than normally you would otherwise.

Y: Also we talked about efficient experts last time, and you said they were (--)

W: That was a management tool to make you work more, get more work out of you. But really, people were smart enough to see through that by slowing down. And no matter what the efficiency man did you only could record what you did. But in the meantime management wasn't asleep either. From your former records they would know how much you produced. And if you slowed down, they knew you slowed down on account of the efficiency man. So what they did was upgrade it more. You're caught between the devil and the deep blue sea.

Y: So they kept records of your work performance?

W: Uh, the only ones they kept records of were the people that were on piecework. Because when you're on piecework it had to be weighed or measured. So that way there they had an actual record. But if you were on what they called day pay, they had no records. Day pay meant that you were on your own, and what you ever did they were happy that you did it that way.

Y: Yeah. I told you before, you are one of the very few people who worked in the same building, the Wood Mills. (W: Right) And uh, who worked for the textile, and later when the Wood Mill became Honeywell. And last time we talked briefly about the changes and differences, and made some comparisons between Textile and [unclear].

W: Well I gave you, I gave you all those, the differences. The reason why it was easier to work for an electronic firm than it was for textiles. Textiles, you never got a break. It was go, go, go, go, go, go.

Y: But they were not, in Honeywell weren't they concerned about the productivity and uh (--)

W: Of course they were concerned about productivity, but they had their uh, you had a ratio, or you had a quota to make. And if you were bouncing about that top part of that quota, they never bothered you. Even humans being what they are, nobody gives the same exact about of work as everybody else. I could be fast, you could be slow, he could be medium. So between the three of us we arrive at a happy medium. From there(--). And another thing, these textiles were known as the [Robber Barons?] (Y: Robber?) Robber Barons when they were in textiles, the owners. They made fortunes out of the people from the way they worked them. And uh, textiles were, you never worked fifty two weeks a year in the textiles. You did in electronics. (Y: You did?) Oh yeah. You worked in electronics fifty-two weeks a year, and at a higher wage. Of course you had to be more skilled.

Y: Yeah. If you look back, do you think the textile mills used you, or do you feel like they took advantage of you? Or uh (--)

W: The name of the game for textiles was to use you as much as they could. Squeeze every drop of water out of a sponge you possibly can. Electronics were not like that.

Y: But if it is true that they made so much money, why couldn't they survive? I mean they, (--)

W: Why couldn't? Well the reason they couldn't survive is because down south they were offering them cheaper labor, no taxes on their real estate. What is a man to do? They all jumped at the chance and went down there, but they didn't fair so well down South either, because after awhile Japan got into the act, Korea, and the rest of those Asian countries. So they, their cheaper wage knocked the textiles right off.

Y: I'd like to ask you another question about high technology. Do you think they would do the same thing the textile mills did thirty, forty years ago? Do you think they will stay in Lawrence, and in New England? How do you see it?

W: Well I look at it this way. You're asking me to make a forecast of the high tech industries. I think right now, myself from reading, comparing notes, charts and everything else, I think myself that electronics had been over built. They've over stimulated the market. That's the reason why Wang is down. That's the reason why IBM is down. That's the reason why Bull is down. That's the reason Dec is down. Over supply of the market. Everybody is loaded with electronic equipment. So now they have to do something else. So what's going to happen is those that are in good financial position will survive. Those that built like Wang Laboratory, they built all over the country like crazy, they're going to submerge into oblivion. You watch and see. And right now if you read the papers, Wang is going worse and worse, day by, week by week they're losing money. One thing that Wang didn't have, and I know people who worked for Wang, is they didn't have a good field service unit. That was, when a machine was down, and the repertoire of the high tech industry, when a machine was down that meant the machine wasn't capable of working, they had nobody to come and fix their machines, which was a very very badly thought out plan on Wang. Because Wang later on admitted that, and they tried to correct it, but it was too late.

Y: So do you think those high technology, high tech companies in Lawrence would do the same as (W: as textiles?) textiles did [unclear].

W: Well they had one big advantage, high tech has compared to textiles. One reason is this. There is very few moving machine parts in high tech, whereas textiles had looms, carding machines, spinning machines. That too a lot of money. And in order to move that to another place of manufacturing would cost them millions of dollars. Whereas high tech, they could close tomorrow and practically say, leave the building there, we don't need anything.

Y: So it is actually easier.

W: Much easier for high tech, because it's assembling, soldering, inspection, shipping, painting,

they have spray departments, and that's that's all stuff that you don't need machinery for really? Of course they have, they built conveyors and everything. Those can be disassembled, but that's not a big thing. So I would say if a high tech moved out they wouldn't suffer as much as a textile mill would.

Y: Yeah, I don't remember if I asked you what your job was in Honeywell? What did you do?

W: Shipper. (Y: Shipper) Shipper.

Y: Well that was your background.

W: That was my background from day one.

Y: What did you ship? Obviously computer [unclear].

W: No. No, no. We had two departments. One shipped the machines. I shipped mostly parts out to field service. Parts out to vendors to be reprogrammed by the vendor. In other words if we might have a part that needs an extra hinge on it. So we'd ship it out to a vendor and he'd put the hinge on and it would come back, they'd be an engineering change on something, a chip out the part. It wasn't too much bulk. It was mostly small stuff. Like UPS would handle most of it. And then I would have truckers come and take the bigger ones.

Y: So you did not ship out the finished product?

W: Finished product was done by another group. And they had more responsibility than I did. They were paid more money, because of the responsibility of sending out a machine that's finished, going out to the people who bought it. So you have to be very careful how you have to load it on and make sure all the parts go along with the machine. And there's quite a bit of detail work to it.

Y: So to be exact, your job was to get a box and put those things in, and then seal the box and write the address, or what?

W: Right, [unclear]. When you get a part, now we're talking about small parts at UPS. Now UPS will give you a limit of 50 lbs. a box, that's the tops. You cannot put more than 50 lbs. in a box. By the same token, if you had to put packing in first to see that the part does not wiggle in there, you have to put the packing just so, so when you seal the box that no part in there giggles around, or moves around. That could damage the part. Then you seal it, address it, and then you entered it in the UPS log, and call them up. They come over, they pick it up. It takes quite a bit of work. It's not (--)

Y: But uh, you are a high school graduate. In those days there were not many high school, that is like graduating from college.

W: Although there weren't many. In my years, when I graduated from Lawrence High school in 1932, you could count on your fingers how many people were going for college from the high school class, because that was the height of depression. Nobody had any real money to send anybody anywhere.

Y: Yeah, what I mean was, so you graduated from the high school, and you seem to be a very very smart person. How did you get satisfaction from putting those parts in the box and working eight hours a day, and so many years.

W: You got to remember this. It wasn't the same part all the time. It could be a thousand part in the week that you ship out, and they're all different. They all demand some kind getting around, making the box bigger, making the box smaller. It was a challenge to see if you could do it. You had to do it the cheapest way, number one. All right. So that meant(--)

Y: What does it mean, cheapest way? I mean if it weighs so much, if you had to sent that part, you send it? What is cheapest way?

W: Oh no. It could weigh forty-two pounds. And my foreman would come down and say, I want that shipped out by UPS and nowhere else. So all right. Here you are dealing with forty-two pounds, the product itself is. I have to figure out how I can ship this out at fifty pounds. That means I got to cut down on something.

Y: Forty pounds you mean?

W: Fifty pounds is the limit you can ship out, but the part weighs forty-pounds. Now I have only ten pounds to play with. That means the packing material, and everything else has to be under ten pounds. It's quite a challenge sometimes to get it under fifty pounds so you can ship it out. But we didn't have that too often. They didn't like to ship out fifty pounds. It was mostly in the one to ten pound range.

Y: But I guess, I assume that you did not use your brain much, and (--)

W: Oh yes I did. (Y: You did?) I had paper work. No, you don't just get on the phone and say, come and pick this up. There was paper work to be done. There was paperwork to be processed. And if you didn't know what you were doing, you could make a heck of a lot of mistakes, and cost the company a lot of money. When you're shipping you have to know what to call the product, and what, and what category that product belonged. And then you have to call up the agent, find out from him. Oh, there's quite a bit. It's not just packing and saying, here, come and get it. No way. No way. I did my own book keeping. I did my own paperwork, besides the shipping. Then I had to keep records. Supposing I shipped something out Monday. Wednesday I got a call from an engineer saying, Bill, did you ship this part out? I'd have to revert to my paper work and say "yes, I shipped it out." "How did you ship it out?" And I'd tell him by who, how many pounds, who picked it up, and when it will arrive.

Y: So I was asking whether you were satisfied, and you seemed to be satisfied.

W: I was, I was very happy. I found out that people always try to push you aside. Especially engineers. That was a joke, a standing joke with me. They used to say, "I'm an engineer." I used to say, "well I don't care who you are. You could be the manager of this plant, you're not going to do it this way. You're going to do it my way, or it won't go." "Well do you know who I

am? Who's your boss?" I let him talk to my boss. You know what happens. They still have to do it my way, because that was my job, not his job.

Y: Well you did not have, you said you had boss.

W: I had a boss, yes. Supervisor and a foreman.

Y: How many people did the same thing you did?

W: I was alone, all alone. Just a statue of liberty, all by myself.

Y: How many supervisor, or supervisors?

W: I had only one. One supervisor and one manager.